

Chapter 193

PART 3

TWO YEARS LATER.

PRINCESS AEKEIRA

"Are we going to keep ignoring the elephant in this court, Your Highness?"

The court had been busy all day with talk of negotiations and upcoming festivities. You would think that after such a long deliberation, the ministers would want nothing more than to leave, go home, and have a hot bath.

But no. Court was never truly complete until 'the elephant in the room' was addressed. The last time, King Orestus's fury had been so frightening that the ministers had scurried away, like rats fleeing a sinking ship.

Six months since it was last brought up, but now here it was, rearing its head again.

All eyes turned to Minister Jacques, who was glaring at Aekeira. She met that glare with one of her own.

King Orestus, who had been about to leave his seat, paused. With a sigh, he settled back down. "What do you mean, Jacques?"

The overseer of military affairs broke his glare at Aekeira long enough to stand. "I mean those girls, Your Highness. At this point, our people are distraught. We once discussed sending them to the breeding houses, which—"

"I adamantly refused," King Orestus added.

"Indeed you did, Your Highness. We suggested the brothel—"

"I refused that too."

Minister Jacques nodded. "It's... quite baffling at this point. We have not one, but two females in this kingdom who refuse to serve the land. They will not fulfill their roles in society, and you, sire, are enabling them. Look at them, they are getting old, approaching the end of their ripe years. Aekeira is—"

"You will address them properly," the king snapped angrily.

"I-I apologize, Your Highness. I was not thinking straight." Minister Jacques jumped, clearing his throat nervously. "Princess Aekeira is twenty-seven, and her sister is twenty-four. Most girls their age have four or five children by now. Yet here they are, where they have no right to be... in the court of men. Listening and even contributing verbally to court proceedings. It is beyond appalling."

A murmur of agreement swept through the court. Some ministers glanced at Jacques with pure admiration. He had voiced what they were too much of a coward to.

Aekeira almost laughed. Here we go again.

"I... umm... I would like to second what Jacques has said, Your Highness," Minister Murphy stood stiffly. "We do not have many females. We cannot afford to let those we have go to waste. Princess Emeriel deceived this court for over twenty years, and in the two years since, you have said nothing of her punishment. If she is to be spared for the sin of deceit, the least she could do is fulfill her duties to the kingdom."

"You mean she should let you between her legs," King Orestus said crudely.

Minister Murphy flushed a deep red, his eyes darting around the room. "I mean... it would be for the betterment of the kingd—"

"What would be for the betterment of the kingdom is to have the likes of you strung up and hung in the square!" Emeriel shot up from her seat, furious.

The room exploded into disorder. Aekeira winced, as Emeriel glared icicles at the high-ranking ministers.

"Men like you," Emeriel seethed, cutting through the noise, "who roam the kingdom violating everyone you come across, sticking your organ into both young and old, all in the name of 'the betterment of society.' You should be hung, and your organs cut off!" She pinned each minister with a frosty glare. "That would be for the betterment of the kingdom!"

Roars of outrage surrounded them.

"How dare she!?"

"Such disrespect!"

"What an insolent little brat!"

King Orestus grabbed his gavel and struck it hard, roaring above the mayhem. "SILENCE!"

The murmurs faded to a low hum but didn't entirely stop.

Another minister rose, looking stern. "Your Highness, you cannot let such insolence go unpunished. She insulted not just one of us, but all of us. Such defiance must be met with consequences."

Emeriel didn't flinch, her cold eyes still locked on the vultures of court.

Times like this, Aekeira found it difficult to reconcile this Emeriel with the sister she once knew. Who was this angry bull of a stranger facing off the court?

Over the years, Emeriel had... changed.

Aekeira had seen each gradual shift, witnessed every small difference until the change was complete. Now, Em was warm with only one person, Aekeira herself.

With everyone else, she was either frigid or burning with anger. Her defenses were constantly up, and the caring, compassionate Emeriel was long gone.

This Emeriel didn't care about others' feelings, she spoke her mind with no regard for the fallout, daring anyone to challenge her. It was almost as if she wanted to be punished.

Like now.

No one, absolutely no one, mouthed off to the ministers. Others who had tried were either banished or executed.

They were known as the ministers of doom for a reason, just as King Orestus was known as the tyrant king.

"We cannot condone such an act," a minister was saying. "We demand punishment—"

Emeriel scoffed, crossing her arms. "A bunch of scums hiding under the veil of power—"

"Em...!" Aekeira hissed, fear prickling through her. Stop before you go too far!

"That's enough," King Orestus snapped. "Leave the court, Emeriel."

Emeriel looked ready to defy the king, her jaw set and eyes burning. But then, her gaze met Aekeira's.

Something in Aekeira's eyes seemed to reach through the fury.

Was it the fear, the concern, or her pleas? Aekeira had no idea, but some of the anger seep out of her sister, her shoulders deflating.

Without another word, Emeriel whirled around and stormed out of court. Thank the gods.

The king faced his ministers. "As I have said before, this matter is not up for discussion. The princesses were my brother's children; now, they are mine. They will not be treated in that manner."

His gaze swept across the court. "Aekeira has transformed the gardens and plantations. Thanks to her, we've had bountiful harvests over the years. The overseer of agriculture will bear witness to that, isn't that right, Minister Edward?"

The minister flushed, clearing his throat. "V-very correct, Your Majesty."

"And Emeriel has returned to the soldiers, training and hunting. She is exceptional at that, having taken down more men in battle than most of our warriors. Many of you have witnessed her skills firsthand, haven't you, Minister of Military Affairs?"

Minister Jacques shifted uncomfortably, unable to meet the king's eyes. He gave a stiff nod.

King Orestus clucked his tongue. "Just because they do not part their thighs for men and breed children doesn't mean they do not serve this kingdom. Do you hear me?"